

MEMORIAL

OF

SAMUEL FORRY,

PRAYING

*Congress to provide for the publication of a Meteorological and Statistical Register.*

DECEMBER 27, 1839.

Referred to a Select Committee, consisting of Messrs. Calhoun, Linn, and Spence, and ordered to be printed.

*To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress assembled :*

The memorial of the undersigned

RESPECTFULLY REPRESENTS :

That in 1819, soon after the organization of the medical department of the army, a system of meteorological observations at the various military posts in the United States, was established by the Hon. John C. Calhoun, then Secretary of War; that although we preceded the British in this measure, yet, as regards practical results, we have fallen far behind them; and that, instead of carrying out the comprehensive views originally entertained by Mr. Calhoun, a systematic arrangement of the phenomena of our climate is now, no less than then, a desideratum. That during the same period, quarterly reports of diseases among the troops have been uninterruptedly made, thus affording the means, in connexion with the returns in the adjutant general's office, not only to investigate morbid action by the numerical method, but to show its relation with climate.

That as the modern application of numerical analysis to the investigation of disease, has given to medical inquiries the same certainty which pertains to statistical researches on other subjects, averages may be regarded, in a great measure, as the mathematics of medical science, constituting an unerring path into the region of its true philosophy. Instead of being bewildered by contradictory conclusions, based on the few cases which fall under the observation of particular practitioners, we are enabled by thus accumulating a vast aggregation of facts extending over thousands of individuals, to deduce the laws by which nature, in inducing mortality by particular diseases, operates. An evidence of the practical value of the numerical mode of analysis, is afforded in the recently published vital statistics of the British army, embracing regions the most remote and diversified.

Blair & Rives, printers.

Your memorialist further represents that the papers now ready for publication, under the title of the "*Meteorological and Statistical Register*," comprise two official reports,—the first, a collection of meteorological facts towards the explanation of the problem of physical climate,—the second, a series of statistical data, showing the application of the principles developed in the former to the causation of disease; and that these reports embrace but a portion of the statistical materials collected in the surgeon general's office, having deemed it politic to pursue the investigation no farther, until public opinion shall have determined the value of the papers now submitted.

That as these meteorological observations, which were originally instituted by order of the War Department, have been continued for twenty years under the same auspices, it would seem a matter of common right that they should be placed within reach of the scientific of all nations, to the end that they may serve to elucidate new questions or confirm established principles. Of the value of these records, no doubt can be entertained. So frequent have been the applications for extracts by scientific gentlemen throughout the United States, that the surgeon general has been unable, at all times, to supply the information desired; and similar applications have also come from scientific individuals and institutions in Europe, through the foreign ministers resident at Washington.

Although the meteorological abstracts now presented do not embrace the whole period of observation, yet as they comprise the results of eleven years, and extend over the entire domain of our States and Territories, it may reasonably be assumed that the numerical ratios exhibit a fair expression of the general laws of our climate,—principles, which further research will confirm and ultimately establish with absolute certainty.

That having devoted a year's labor, besides performing the legitimate duties required by my commission as assistant surgeon, in the analysis and condensation of the "*Diaries of the Weather*," and the "*Sick Reports*," in the surgeon general's office, and of the post returns of the strength in the adjutant general's office; and that whereas the publication of such works may not be justified by public patronage, however valuable they may be in a national point of view in connexion with military operations, as indicating the comparative salubrity of different regions, not to speak of the imperative duty of Government to give to the world scientific facts now sealed up in its archives, your memorialist would, therefore, respectfully ask that Congress may extend the aid necessary to effect the dissemination of this useful knowledge.

And, lastly, that as the publication of these papers is recommended in the annual report of the surgeon general, the petition of the undersigned is restricted to a single point, viz, that Congress, instead of ordering its publication in the customary mode, direct the purchase of such number of copies as they, in their judgment, may deem expedient,—a measure which, without subjecting Government to extraordinary expense, will secure pecuniary compensation to the author of a work, which was originally begun semi-officially,—the materials being of such a nature that the result of his labors must depend upon his own judgment and general knowledge of the subject.

All which is respectfully submitted by your petitioner.

SAMUEL FORRY.